7:Thurston E-5 (no date)1909
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religion of this exceptionally interesting tribe, numbering, according to the latest census returns, 807 individuals, which inhabits the Nīlgiri plateau. I shall, therefore, content myself with recording the rambling notes made by myself during occasional visits to Ootacamund and Paikāra, supplemented by extracts from the book just referred to, and the writings of Harkness and other pioneers of the Nīlgiris.

The Todas maintain a large-horned race of semi-domesticated buffaloes, on whose milk and its products (butter and ney)* they still depend largely, though to a less extent than in bygone days before the establishment of the Ootacamund bazar, for existence. It has been said that "a Toda's worldly wealth is judged by the number of buffaloes he owns. Witness the story in connection with the recent visit to India of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. A clergyman, who has done mission work among the Todas, generally illustrates Bible tales through the medium of a magic-lantern. One chilly afternoon, the Todas declined to come out of their huts. Thinking they required humouring like children, the reverend gentleman threw on the screen a picture of the Prince of Wales, explaining the object of his tour, and, thinking to impress the Todas, added 'The Prince is exceedingly wealthy, and is bringing out a retinue of two hundred people.' 'Yes, yes,' said an old man, wagging his head sagely, 'but how many buffaloes is he bringing?"

The Todas lead for the most part a simple pastoral life. But I have met with more than one man who had served, or who was still serving Government in the modest capacity of a forest guard, and I have heard of

* Ney = ghi or clarified butter.

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others who had been employed, not with conspicuous success, on planters' estates. The Todas consider it beneath their dignity to cultivate land. A former Collector of the Nīlgiris granted them some acres of land for the cultivation of potatoes, but they leased the land to the Badagas, and the privilege was cancelled. In connection with the Todas' objection to work, it is recorded that when, on one occasion, a mistake about the ownership of some buffaloes committed an old Toda to jail, it was found impossible to induce him to work with the convicts, and the authorities, unwilling to resort to hard remedies, were compelled to save appearances by making him an overseer. The daily life of a Toda woman has been summed up as lounging about the mad or mand (Toda settlement), buttering and curling her hair, and cooking. The women have been described as free from the ungracious and menial-like timidity of the generality of the sex in the plains. When Europeans (who are greeted as swāmi or god) come to a mand, the women crawl out of their huts, and chant a monotonous song, all the time clamouring for tips (inām). Even the children are so trained that they clamour for money till it is forthcoming. As a rule, the Todas have no objection to Europeans entering into their huts, but on more than one occasion I have been politely asked to take my boots off before crawling in on the stomach, so as not to desecrate the dwelling-place. Writing in 1868, Dr. J. Shortt makes a sweeping statement that "most of the women have been debauched by Europeans, who, it is sad to observe, have introduced diseases to which these innocent tribes were once strangers, and which are slowly but no less surely sapping their once hardy and vigorous constitutions. The effects of intemperance and disease (syphilis) combined are becoming more and more

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595 [621] [592]

his estimate. As it was, I found nearly always at least two polyandrous households in every single *mund* that I visited in 1939, and never one in which there was no polyandry.

At Or, a *mad* belonging to the Norsh *modol*, I found four brothers married to one woman, with the two elder brothers married to another woman, and living with her in another house a little further away. At Pakharkwur, a Karsh *mad*, a man named Nipö, already father of five girls, had lately been joined by his younger brother, because the latter had recently lost his wife, and the mother of the children had had to accept him as a husband as well. Here also, two other brothers had one wife in common, and, as in the previous case, had put up a separate household close-by. Another good example of polyandry among the Tardharsh moiety of the tribe (to which the above mentioned people belonged), was that of the Melgarsh *etumad* (chief *mad*), in which there were three older men sharing one wife, and their three sons married in the same way to a single woman. In a separate house of the *mad*, two cousins of the previous men had likewise a common wife between them. We shall return more fully to Melgarsh in the second part of this chapter, when the account of the special study which I made in 1949 of that *mad* will be given.

601 595

Among the Teivilkhs, I also found many polyandrous unions when I visited the Todas for the first time in 1939. Thus at Kiur, a Kuur *mad* I saw two brothers with one wife in common, the mother of one child. At Arsh *mad* (Badaga name: Anekkalmund), belonging to the same Kuur *modol* of the Teivilkh, I met Eroï, Keel and Konokh (56), the last two living polyandrously with a woman called Mab, after they had earlier shared another one called Potöz. I found these people so friendly and interesting that I stayed some time with them in order to become better acquainted with their history and way of living.

On June 19th, 1939, I made their genealogy, which was then as recorded in Table 21.

[584]

Potöz, to whom the three brothers had earlier been married polyandrously, had herself first been betrothed, I was told, to her *matchuni* Kazan, at the age of two, as is the Toda custom. When she came of age, however, after due compensation had been paid to Kazan's family, she married the three brothers from Arshmad, but fell ill very early and died before she could bear them any children.

[467] [587]

Then the following occurred: Eroï found employment as a government peon, and decided to leave the association. He married the girl called Sotsbuf, took away one third plus two of the buffaloes owned

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159 621 mainly sitting in the sun or, when it rains during the monsoon, in the house in which she lives. She is remarkable for a protruding front tooth; the children do not go near her, and she occasionally receives visitors of her own age from other *mads*.

[614] [754] (2) KARNOZ: Aged sixty, he is the chief of the Melgarsh clan. A sly, nasty old man, he is reputed, as I have said, to be a *pili* (sorcerer) and is universally disliked and feared, even by his own brothers. I have already told the tale of how he became head of his *modol* by ruthlessly eliminating Ujar and his family (see p. 266).

(3) Kupidz: She is a white-haired widow who, after the deaths of her husbands and children, has returned to live out her remaining years with her brothers and their family. She is a most charming person, always with a smile on her face, partaking of the life of the *mad*, doing odd jobs here and there to help, and is a great favourite of the children, whom she loves. She is an inveterate beggar, and is always coming to me for clothes, spectacles (for her bad eyes), medicine and *bakshish*; but she is so jolly and nice about it that I find it very difficult to say no to her.

[735] [123]

(4) PADS: Two years younger than Karnoz, his elder brother, he is of a shy and mild disposition. He is a gardener in the Ootacamund Botanical Gardens which occupation is somewhat of a departure from Toda tradition. He, nevertheless, does not give up his pastoral duties, and takes an active part in tending the buffaloes with the others, outside his working hours. For his work in the Botanical Gardens, he will dress in non-Toda clothes, but every evening on coming back to the *mad* he dons the tribal *putkili* without which he would not dream of carrying out his Toda obligations. He is now the head of the family, Karnoz having taken a new young wife, and it is obvious that Silidz and the children look upon him with affection, if not perhaps with much consideration.

[464] [291]

(5) Silidz: She is a hard-working housewife, worn and withered prematurely by too much devotion to her domestic duties. She is fifty-five, but appears older. She is always busy about the house, cooking meals, fetching water, stitching the clothes of the others, even feeding the pariah dogs on left-over scraps of food. It was with the greatest difficulty that I was able to interrogate her, as she always pleaded that she had no time to spare for me. She is, however, of a charming disposition, never complaining and always willing to do anything which is asked of her, even by the small children who quite scandalously take advantage of her good nature.

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(6) Nalsirwurf: The young wife of Karnoz, whom he took in 1945, thus putting an end to the polyandrous arrangement with Pads. She is twenty-five years old – thirty-five years younger than her husband. She is a beautiful woman, probably the handsomest of the whole tribe, and knowns it. She assumes languorous, indolent airs, which give her a certain amount of added attraction, as it suits her dusky, classical features, and figure, but I was unable to make out if this behaviour was due to a deliberately studied poise or if it was the result of her life with Karnoz which, as was to be expected, is not a happy one; the old man is far too domineering and matter of fact with her, while obviously very proud that he has taken her to wife. 159 621

(7) MUTNARSH: An ugly, hard-working, intelligent and willful man, the real head of the whole family for which he selflessly works very hard. He is devoted to his wife and children and would do anything to assist them. When I first met Mutnarsh (after the birth of the two last twins) he struck me as being unreliable and unpleasant; but after I had got used to him, I came to appreciate his outstanding qualities as a husband and father, and developed considerable respect for him. He too is a gardener in the Botanical Gardens. [464]

(8) KUDDIRUE: A cripple, aged twenty-five, ten years younger than Mutnarsh. He cannot walk upright, the broken joints of his knees keeping him from extending these, and obliging him to walk with them constantly bent. The story which his family tells is that, as a child, he was sitting on the wall of the buffalo pen, when Kali (the Indian goddess of destruction) in the form of wind threw him down and broke both his legs. He is extremely ugly, with a wild look in his eyes, but on the other hand, he is exceptionally good-natured and happy, and is very attached to the children who do not, however, return his affection. He is nearly always employed as a priest, if not in the *tarvali* of the Melgarsh *mad*, in the tribe's *wursulis* for which he is very much sought after. [732] [793]

(9) MUNBOKWUTH: The youngest brother of the trio, aged nineteen. When I was in the Nilgiris ten years earlier, he was only nine, but already a polyandrous husband of the brothers' common wife, Ernigwuf. He is still only an overgrown boy, very athletic and strong, a great favourite of the children with whom he behaves more as a big brother than as a father. He takes an active part in the tending of the buffaloes, and is never far from the *mad* where he apparently likes to stay. [595]

(10) Ernigwuf: The embodiment of motherhood, aged thirty, she is one of the few fertile women of the tribe (there were one hundred Toda woman who were sterile at the time of my stay in 1949). As she is so [842]

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159 621 in the Nilgiris in 1949, and spends his time wrapped up in his mother's *putkuli*, where he happily sucks her breast to his heart's content.

(17) Unnamed girl: She, the twin of Peterozn, lived only twelve days.

(18) SINGARSH: A great, black-bearded Toda, he stalks about, long and lean, swathed in his *putkuli*, nearly always watching the family's buffaloes. He is silent and serious and appears to be very conservative. [276] He takes snuff and rarely goes to the bazar, his usual sorties being reserved for the visiting of other *mods*. He is very fond of Sodup and often takes him out with him, wrapped up under his cloak, perched on his left forearm. He has been seen to laugh heartily at times – although this is rare – at the things that Sodup says.

(19) SINGUD: Also of the silent type, he is a good-looking man, clean-shaven except for a short moustache. He is a forest guard of the Madras [464] Forestry Department, and is usually in uniform and away on duty from [291] Melgarsh. When he does come home, he immediately dons the Toda *putkuli* and lends a hand with bringing in the buffaloes or taking them out.

(20) Amoniwuf: The common wife of the two brothers above. She is always busy with the household, if not her own, then that of Silidz, [897] whom she helps a lot. She has a cicisbeo, a Teivilkh of Teir *mad* of the Kusharf *modol* who comes to see her regularly, he having been accepted by the husbands.

(21) MOTSOD: A very lazy man. He spends his days sleeping either in front of the house or on the grass before it. He is middle-aged, handsome, with a fine grey beard and light coloured eyes, but so apathetic that it is really surprising. He occasionally puts in a spell as a priest at the *mad*'s *tarvali*, but never for long. He also sometimes accompanies [293] the boys on grazing expeditions with the buffaloes (when they migrate to other more distant grazing grounds), but very quickly returns to loll about the precincts of the *mad*.

(22) Isam: His wife, a colourless woman, who keeps very much in the background and consorts principally with Odzel and Silidz.

(23) PILKHLIVOWUTN: A rather sheepish, shy young man, in his early [464] twenties, who is also a gardener in the Botanical Gardens. He is not often at the *mad*, as his duties appear to keep him very busy. He seems just as slow as his father, although slightly more active. He usually has a silly grin on his face; he is clean-shaven with a downy, budding moustache.

(24) KERSHARSWUTN: A very young fellow, about the age of Pershörsh, and is a great friend of the latter. The two of them delight in

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being with the buffaloes and are usually put in charge of the grazing of the herd. He too is reputed to be "good" with the animals. 159 621

(25) Närshmali: A lively and comely young woman, who keeps her household very tidy. She is always washing herself or doing her hair, in full view of everybody, which she seems to enjoy. She pours water over herself from a pot with her undergarment on, tightly tied under her armpits, it is true, but she very often lets it slip when drying herself, with exclamations of consternation, as if it were an accident. She is [832] quite a flirt at Toda gatherings, and I have seen Pilkhlivowutn have to [837] search for her in the bushes of a *shola* and drive her home again with a stick. Her second husband, Porshwutn, a mere boy, is never much at home. I was amused, however, to see him and his elder brother one day when Närshmali had actually really run away from them, complacently attending to the household chores themselves and, they said, just waiting for the *terershti* buffaloes that were their probable due to be paid to them.

(26) Pufvkiarge: The only son of the notorious Toda Pebob who spent his time carrying off other men's wives, this man had an unhappy childhood. Both his mother and father died when he was very small, and there was nobody really left to look after him. It is said that sur- [847] viving members of his father's family wanted to drown him as a useless [797] mouth, and that he was saved from this premature death by Miss C. F. Ling of the Church of England's Zenana Mission. She brought him up to be a Christian, but when he came of age he is reported not to have accepted Christianity and to have returned to the Toda religion. He is a weak-chinned, thin man, with a resigned and apathetic look on his face, but recognized by the other Todas as knowing more than they because of his earlier association with the Christian Mission. For this reason, he has been appointed a member of the Collector's Toda Welfare Committee and he does everything that he can to assist his brethren. He also [464] works as a gardener in the Botanical Gardens.

(27) Mutmali: After Nalsirwuf, probably the second best-looking Toda girl. She is an inveterate flirt and has run away from her husband [832] many times with other men. Somehow, however, she always returns [837] after some days, without Pufvkiarge exerting himself in any way. Last time I saw this happen, he simply carried on with the housekeeping himself, while assuring me that it would not be long before Mutmali came back. This proved to be true, and some five days later she was again at Melgarsh, sulking somewhat, and offering no excuse, but already having taken up the household chores again.

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2. FAMILY LIFE AT MELGARSH

From the plan of the Melgarsh *mad* in Figure 18, it will be seen that there are three inhabited houses. These are numbered respectively from 1 to 3 and have the following names: No. 1, the *Warthuttiarsh*, or Bamboo House, i.e. the chief house, built with more bamboos than the others (in each Toda *mad* there is such a *Warthuttiarsh*); No. 2, the *Nortzarsh*, or Middle House; No. 3, the *Pudharsh*, or New House; these two last houses are also known as *Pardzilarsh* or Ordinary Houses, as opposed to the *Warthuttiarsh*.

In Figs. 19, 20, and 21 plans of each of these houses are given, with indications as to who sleeps in them and where.

Kuddhue, who was frequently *tarvalikartmokh* when I was at Melgarsh, slept together with Pershrörsh in the *tarvali* (not accounted for in the figures above, but visible in Fig. 18).

On the whole, the order in which people slept in the houses was surprising. Asked why, for instance Sodup slept with his grandfather and not with his parents as would have been expected, the Todas told me that it was "for his virile education". That Motsod and Izam slept on the floor when their sons slept on the *ertilkh* seemed to me equally astonishing, but I was made to understand that the latter were the coming generation and should be made as comfortable as possible with their common wife.

The finances of the Melgarsh family were equally unpredictable. Thus apart from the revenue in kind which the buffaloes brought in, and the capital invested in the houses and dairy-temples, the men received the following remunerations in cash from outside:

Puds: Rs. 46 a month as gardener in the Botanical Gardens, Ootacamund.

Mutnarsh: Rs. 36 as a gardener at the same place, and another Rs. 36 from the lease of the potato field which the government has imposed on the *mad*, lease which has gone to a Badaga cultivator.

Munbokwutn; Rs. 12 a week as a casual labourer with various Badagas.

Singud: Rs. 36 a month as a forest guard of the Madras Forestry Department.

Pilkhlivowutn: Rs. 36 as a gardener in the Botanical Gardens.

Porshwutn (Motsod's absentee son): Rs. 60 a year, clothes and food from a Badaga cultivator for whom he works and with whom he lives.

Pufvkiarot: Rs. 35 a month as a gardener in the Botanical Gardens.

[text continues on p. 290]